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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000025

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SUBJECT: CHARGE CALL ON NEW FOREIGN MINISTER DIACONESCU

Classified By: CDA, a.i. Jeri Guthrie-Corn; Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Newly-installed Foreign Minister Cristian Diaconescu met with Charge on January 14 to share his thoughts on those foreign policy issues Romania will emphasize during his tenure. He first focused on neighborhood concerns, including the importance of improving Romanian-Ukrainian relations. Diaconescu noted, for example, that the International Court of Justice in The Hague would announce its long-awaited decision on the disputed continental shelf between Romania and Ukraine (and the impact of Serpent Island in determining the maritime boundary) at the end of January. Diaconescu predicted that the decision would be in Romania's favor, but Ukraine likely would postpone full compliance with the decision by seeking some bilateral agreements that the court decision would not require.

¶2. (C) Diaconescu also said he wanted to focus on a more eastward-looking foreign policy especially toward the Middle East, Caucasus, and Ukraine. He said he planned to travel to Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and Russia in the near term. He believed that Russia's perception of Romanian-Moldovan relations was not accurate, and that Russia did not realize Romania was serious in its recognition of Moldovan sovereignty. Diaconescu (picking up on a theme first raised by President Basescu) stated that Romania needed to be part of the "5 plus 2" arrangement, and would like to conclude a bilateral treaty with Moldova. But he also speculated that concluding a treaty could be too difficult for Chisinau in this election year.

¶3. (C) Diaconescu intended to convene a Black Sea regional meeting for Political Directors in mid-February to try to enhance Black Sea cooperation. He stated that energizing a Black Sea regional strategy could only happen through high-level direct talks with Ukraine, Russia and Turkey; but he also noted that the latter two were the most reluctant to engage. He expressed hope that the Czech EU presidency would seriously pursue an EU common energy policy. He reported that Prague recently organized a teleconference with Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia, and all Foreign Ministers agreed to participate in the EU-Russia pipeline monitoring agreement in Ukraine. Charge expressed hoped that this would be a significant step toward better regional cooperation on energy issues.

¶4. (C) Diaconescu then turned to Gaza, where Romania has a significant diaspora. He noted that most Romanian expats had been successfully evacuated from Gaza. He also said that on the eve of the French hand-over of the EU presidency to the Czech Republic, Foreign Minister Kouchner convened an informal meeting on Gaza. He noted that there was a diversity of perspectives at that meeting, but Romania was disappointed to be one of few EU states interested in wanting to discuss the problem of the state supporters (Syria and Iran) for Hamas. Romania's view now was that violence must

cease immediately and that humanitarian aid must get to Gaza.

Romania may provide some pharmaceutical humanitarian aid in the next days, he thought, recognizing that " Hamas started the crisis, but now with 800 dead the concern must be to quell the violence."

15. (C) Diaconescu said he intended to name career diplomats in the higher visibility secretariats, and that for the State Secretaries, first on his list were former ambassadors to Germany, NATO and Geneva. He specifically noted that former Romanian ambassador to UN Geneva (and former President of the UN Human Rights Council) Doru Romulus Costea and former NATO Permrep Bogdan Mazaru have been named to replace State Secretaries Raduta Matache and Iulian Buga. Note: the specific MFA portfolios are still under consideration. End note.

16. (C) Diaconescu then turned to natural gas issues, noting that Romania imports 31 percent from Russia; he did not want to allow Russia to dominate EU economies by virtue of its gas monopoly. He underscored that Romania was firmly in the pro-Nabucco camp (despite Russian disinformation efforts to the contrary). He argued for needing to build gas pipeline interconnectivity among Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria so that EU neighbors can assist each other during an energy crisis. He said Romania would seek EU funds for this effort.

17. (C) Noting that Diaconescu has roles beyond just foreign minister--as a sitting Senator, member of the cabinet, and as a former Justice Minister (in 2004)--Charge raised the issue of U.S. commitment to Romania making more progress combating corruption and in support of the rule of law and justice

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reform. Charge put particular emphasis on our support for National Anti-Corruption Agency Chief Daniel Morar and Prosecutor General Laura Kovesi, both of whom were marginalized in the previous government. Diaconescu said that within six months he wants to have a strategy for the "de-politicization" of the justice sector in Romania. He judged that the 2005 decision, which reversed his own policy, to allow the Minister of Justice to appoint prosecutors was a mistake that opened the political card. He admitted there were problems with the Supreme Council of Magistrates, where more professional and able magistrates were needed, but that the structure--a fence between politics and justice--should be retained and enhanced. He stated that Parliament needed to get out of the business of obsessing over indictments, and noted that the oligarch-dominated press was often irresponsible and has led to a perception of corruption and injustice that was worse than the reality. The danger therein was loss of confidence in institutions by the populace. He believed that the new government would accelerate the revision of criminal and civil codes.

18. (C) Comment: Diaconescu is a well-known and long contact for the embassy, and has more integrity and professionalism than most Romanian politicians. His priorities are more continuity than change, including his expressed interest in developing more Middle East relationships. The situation in Gaza--where Romania is actively evacuating dozens of its citizens--was just another reminder of the many Romanian expats living throughout the region, and the need to maintain strong networks of contacts there. Ukraine has taken a higher profile in the MFA as a direct result of Russia's August moves against Georgia; we can expect this theme to continue to play out throughout the year. Finally, energy security issues and, to some extent, Moldova are also about Russia. Basescu signaled towards the end of last year a need to improve Bucharest's ties to Moscow. While some may see this as reflecting ongoing economic interests, Diaconescu, like most senior officials appreciate the Romanian adage: "Call the bear uncle, until you are safe across the bridge." End Comment.
GUTHRIE-CORN